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Main image by
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Additional photography
Courtesy of the artists

Oh Malones

Mother and daughter artistic duo Angela and Steff Malone tell us about their unique creative partnership

Bringing up two children on her own in Westgate-on-Sea, award-winning artist Angela Malone overcame many challenges to pursue a creative life, often bringing her children Ralph and Steff in as muses or assistants. Steff, now also an artist, has faced her own challenges through the years due to issues with her physical health. Far from letting this impede her work, she has a flourishing career painting commissions and working alongside her mother on many impressive projects.

The collaborative nature of this mother and daughter relationship is far-reaching; they bounce ideas off each other, have joint exhibitions, troubleshoot, join forces on public commissions and paint murals, as well as providing each other with unwavering emotional support. Here we find out more about the path taken by these two determined and dynamic women, and where they are headed next. ►

◀ Tell us about your work.

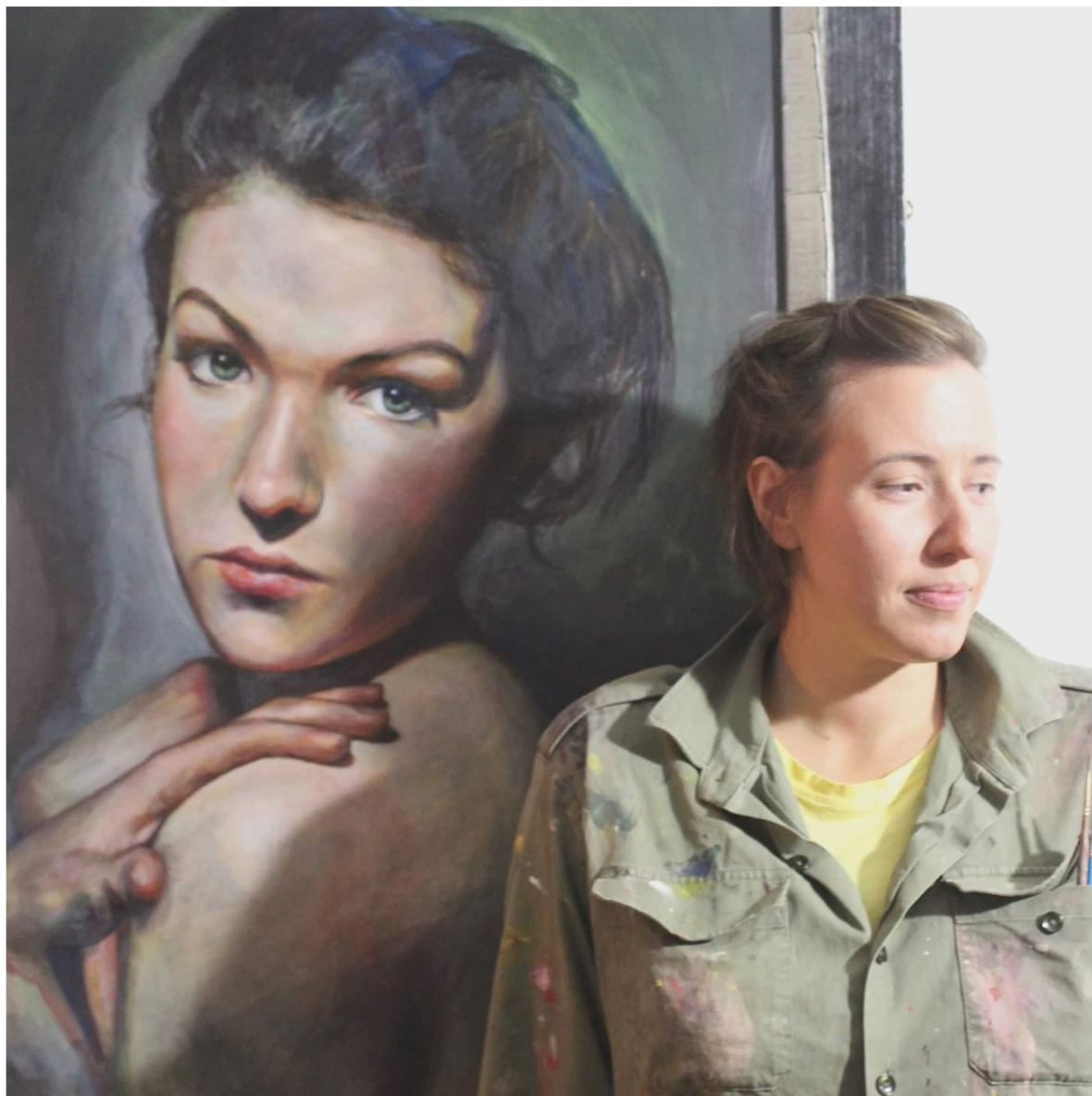
Steff: I have always been fascinated by faces. I remember being told in school to try drawing other things, but I have always gravitated back to what makes a person that person you recognise. The practicalities of painting or drawing often dictate how I make the work more often than I'd like to admit. I was born with very mild cerebral palsy, so mild it isn't visible or obvious to anyone who isn't closely connected to my more private day-to-day tasks. If my grip is poor, I use sponges; if my elbows hurt with pressure, I switch to pastels; and if I get a commission that's large, Mum and I share it. So when I'm unable to climb a ladder, I don't lose the job. I am so lucky; I now have a tilting table to rest my arms when they are sore, a projector to help me see the scale of a picture if my left eye doesn't co-operate - the list goes on.

Angela: My practice is very much based in the genre of portraiture. I fill sketchbooks with speedy "scribbles" of people and then convert my favourites into ceramic figures. I'm interested in capturing a fleeting emotion which the viewer can recognise. I am currently working on a new series of dried flower botanicals, examining the beauty of nature in all its various states of being. In between, I am a keen stone-carver, re-imagining historical stone from Canterbury Cathedral and Pugin's church at Ramsgate.

Was home life always creative?

Steff: Always! I remember my jobs included pursing my lips to puff the air bubbles out of a piece of stained-glass painting which rested on all the chairs in the front room. If we wanted food or drink while mum was doing this, we would need to army-crawl under the coloured glass. Sometimes I would just lie under it and chat to mum through the picture she was making on the glass. She used to ask me to draw everything I could see.

Angela: Right from the start, as a single parent, my children were an integral and natural part of my artistic practice (they were constant models, for example) and accompanied me as I tried to hold on to my identity through what was a challenging few years. The children helped paint murals over their bedroom walls and a Japanese-style room for myself. They even painted the tiles in the bathroom, the remains of which



“For both of us I think, generosity of spirit in sharing any problems and solutions is key, we respect and nurture each other”

are lingering still I'm glad to say. I remember Steffany being inspired by Damien Hirst's spin paintings and wanting to try them. I knew it would be messy, but I bought her a wheel anyway.

In what ways do you work together now?

Steff: In every way we can. Mum possesses skills I don't have. I am happy for her to step in at any time - be it a mural, a portrait commission or a public project. I love discussing approaches with her. My fiancé calls us the two Furbies because once we get the chance to talk art we are away!

Angela: Our professional practice together really has its roots in our degree years together. We graduated from UCA Canterbury within a year of each other. We supported each other so much that we realised it was the start of a whole new collaboration for us.

What strengths do you draw on from each other?

Steff: I feel empowered by Mum's story so far, she always finds a way to make the most out of any situation, however difficult it may seem. She has always said, "If you get an opportunity in art, just say yes and come find me to figure out how afterwards."

Angela: At some stage in the journey of a joint collaboration, there's often a low point where it seems to stall, or an obstacle comes along that you hadn't expected. Whichever one of us is more stressed, the other takes over for a bit, no matter what the job in hand. We both naturally recognise when the other needs a break or a confidence boost to get to the end. ▶





Angela teaching watercolours at Turner Contemporary

◀ **Is creativity nature or nurture?**

Steff: I would say creativity without nurture will always surface, just maybe not shine for a while. I count myself incredibly lucky to have my mum as my mum, because when my hands were sore, or my physio hurt a lot, I could just lose myself in art. Nothing has changed - it feels like a superpower and without nurture it may have stayed a hobby.

Angela: It's a mixture of both, I think. Steffany has such a natural affinity with colour, it's just an acute vision that she was born with and that I could never mimic. I'm in awe of that. For both of us, I think, generosity of spirit in sharing any problems and solutions is key. We respect and nurture each other.

What are you currently working on?

Steff: I am often working on commissioned portraits of those who have just arrived in the world

or just passed away. Larger works of mine can be seen in Store Street Gallery in London, and smaller prints and pieces are often on sale at Birchington Framing Centre in Thanet, and Sowley-UK Gallery in Canterbury. Every few months we hold a class for people to learn watercolours from life at the Turner in Margate, booked via our websites.

Angela: We are coming to the end of preparations for a major exhibition of our work in Whitstable, which we have been working on for the last two years. I'll be showing work in the Pie Factory Margate next year, and we have been offered a joint exhibition in Deal next year. I've just started an MA at The Margate School, so obviously that's taking up some of my time, but it's such an exciting new venture which I'm very privileged to be part of.

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